

Message Text

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ACTION PM-07

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 EB-11 OMB-01 CIAE-00 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 USIA-15 TRSE-00

SAJ-01 ABF-01 IGA-02 DODE-00 DRC-01 SS-20 NSC-07

ACDA-19 MC-02 /135 W

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R 220915Z APR 74

FM AMEMBASSY ROME

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4423

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY OSLO

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

USMISSION NATO

USNMR SHAPE

CINCUSAFE

USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 5522

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, EBXP, IT, BE, NE, NO, DA

SUBJECT: F-104 REPLACEMENT AIRCRAFT

1. US-BASED LOCKHEED REPRESENTATIVE ROBERT F. TILLMAN CALLED ON AMBASSADOR AND EMBOFFS APRIL 11 TO GIVE US HIS PERCEPTION OF CURRENT

STATE OF PLAY RE F-104 REPLACEMENT AIRCRAFT, AND TO SOLICIT EMBASSY SUPPORT FOR LOCKHEED'S EFFORTS IN ITALY, WHICH HE FELT MIGHT TIP SCALES IN LOCKHEED'S FAVOR AMONG THE NORTHERN COUNTRIES.

2. TILLMAN GAVE GENERALLY UP-BEAT ASSESSMENT OF LOCKHEED'S CHANCES IN BELGIUM, THE NETHERLANDS, DENMARK AND NORWAY, ESPECIALLY
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THE FORMER TWO. HE SAID HE HAD BEEN ASSURED BY TECHNICAL AND

MILITARY EXPERTS IN BOTH COUNTRIES THAT DESPITE LOCKHEED'S OFFICIAL NO-COMPETITOR STATUS IN THE NETHERLANDS AND FRENCH PRESSURES IN BELGIUM, THE LANCER WOULD BE THE CHOICE FROM THE TECHNOLOGICAL POINT OF VIEW. HE ALSO WAS COUNTING HEAVILY ON NORWEGIAN PRESSURE IN THE AD-HOC GROUP TO SWING THE BELGIAN DECISION IN FAVOR OF A US AIRCRAFT. HOWEVER, HE SAID HE WAS INFORMED THAT THE FRENCH WERE AT THIS MOMENT MOUNTING A MAJOR CAMPAIGN AT POLITICAL LEVEL IN BRUSSELS TO SEW UP THE CHOICE OF THE MIRAGE.

3. TILLMAN SAID THAT, WHILE THE NUMBER OF AIRCRAFT PRESENTLY BEING CONSIDERED FOR THE NORTHERNCOUNTRIES IS SUFFICIENT TO BRING THE UNIT PRICE DOWN TO MANAGEABLE LEVELS, AN ITALIAN DECISION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE CONSORTIUM OR AT LEAST TO PLACE AN ORDER FOR THE LANCER WOULD MAKE THE UNIT PRICE SO ATTRACTIVE THAT IT WOULD BE DECISIVE IN THE NORTHERNERS' CHOICE. HE NOTED THAT THE TENTATIVE AGREEMENT REACHED LAST YEAR BETWEEN LOCKHEED AND AERITALIA TO PRODUCE TWO LANCER PROTOTYPES, BASED ON THIRD-COUNTRY SALES POTENTIAL, HAD NOT YET BEEN WRAPPED UP, PENDING THE SECURING OF THE NECESSARY CREDITS FROM ITALIAN FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS. HE ASKED WHAT WE THOUGHT THE EMBASSY COULD DO TO STRENGTHEN ITALIAN COMMITMENT TO LANCER.

4. WE REITERATED THAT, AS TILLMAN KNEW, ITALIAN AIR FORCE BUY OF LANCER WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO CONTEMPLATE AS LONG AS MRCA WAS STILL ON THE TRACKS. HE UNDERSTOOD AND DID NOT PRESS THE POINT. WE FURTHER POINTED OUT THAT SINCE ORIGINAL EMBASSY SUPPORT FOR LOCKHEED-AERITALIA DEAL, NORTHROP AND GENERAL DYNAMICS HAD EVINced SOME INTEREST IN ITALIAN MARKET. THEREFORE, EMBASSY WOULD HAVE TO FOLLOW POLICY OF EVEN-HANDEDNESS BETWEEN US COMPETITORS. AMBASSADOR ASSURED TILLMAN THAT, WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF AN EVEN-HANDED POLICY VIS-A-VIS US FIRMS, THE EMBASSY WOULD DO ALL IT COULD TO STRESS TO ITALIANS THE DESIRABILITY OF CONTINUING THE LONG-STANDING US-ITALIAN COOPERATION IN THE MILITARY AIRCRAFT FIELD.

5. COMMENT: WE RECOGNIZED THAT TILLMAN'S OPTIMISTIC EVALUATION OF LANCER'S CHANCES IN BELGIUM AND THE NETHERLANDS DOES NOT SQUARE WITH EMBASSIES BRUSSELS AND THE HAGUE'S RECENT TELEGRAMS ON SUBJECT, BUT WE REFRAINED FROM DEBATING QUESTION WITH HIM. VOLPE

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